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most of all

by thebrotherswinchester

Summary

Five times Bucky dances with Steve.

(In which there are Lindy Hops, waltzes, drunken nights, fake boyfriends, a 21st century gay club, a pair of ridiculously expensive suits, and eventually it all works out.)

Notes

Based on a prompt from ackradin: "bucky trying to teach steve how to dance"
Thanks to Brynna for her swing dancing knowledge. If I got anything wrong, it's my fault.
Warnings: a touch of period-typical homophobia.
Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

* * *

“You always break the kindest heart
With a hasty word you can't recall
So if I broke your heart last night
It's because I love you most of all.”
—The Mills Brothers, “You Always Hurt The One You Love”

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one

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“Finally,” Bucky says, the moment Steve steps out of the grocer's. “Took ya long enough.”

“I get off work at the same time every day, Buck,” says Steve, folding his green apron under his arm. He squints in the late afternoon sunlight, even though it's October and the sun is pale and watery, falling into step beside Bucky. There's a smear of black grime across his left cheekbone, his blond hair stringy with sweat.

Bucky grins at him. “Well, lucky for you, we still got time to get you cleaned up.”

Steve nods absently, then frowns. “Wait. Cleaned up for what?”

“Caroline and Sandy,” Bucky says. Steve opens his mouth to protest, but Bucky cuts him off, slinging an arm across his bony shoulders. “No, c'mon, it's been ages since you went out for a night. Pretty girls, dancing, maybe even a coupla drinks...”

Bucky yanks open the door of their ancient apartment building and they head up the five flights of rickety stairs. He listens closely to Steve's breathing the whole time. On a good day, Steve can make it to the third landing before his lungs start rattling. On a bad day, it only takes a single flight before he's wheezing, coughing up mucus or—on the worst days—blood.

Today is a good day. Bucky's shoulders feel suddenly light.

“It'll be fun,” he wheedles, unlocking the door. The familiar smell of cat piss and mothballs washes over him, even though he and Steve own neither a cat nor any mothballs. “Your girl Caroline's a cute little thing—”

“Littler than me?” Steve asks dryly.

“She's *sweet*,” Bucky says. He drags Steve into the tiny bathroom, starts wiping the grime off his face. “C'mon, Stevie, humor me.”

Steve rolls his eyes but stands still while Bucky scrubs at his face. He's just wearing a thin white T-shirt and work pants, his collarbones sharp under the harsh light, his skin almost translucent.

He meets Bucky's eyes, smiling a little. “No chance you're gonna let me sit this one out, huh?”

“Nope,” says Bucky. “You'll like Caroline, I promise. Dance with her, treat her to some peanuts, maybe you'll even get a goodnight kiss.”

Steve mumbles something as he yanks his T-shirt over his head. As always, Bucky takes in the cut of his hipbones, the faint press of his ribs through his skin, and swallows hard. No matter how many hours he puts in at the docks, no matter how much Steve works himself stiff at the grocer's for extra cash, they can never quite manage to get his weight up.

Bucky raises his eyebrows. “Didn't quite catch that.”

Steve looks away, cheeks flushed. “Nothin'.”

“No, what is it?”

“It's just,” says Steve, “not sure how I'm s'posed to take a girl dancing when I don't know how to dance.”

“You know how to dance,” Bucky says immediately. He's definitely seen Steve dance before. At least once. *Surely* he's seen Steve dance—they've been on a few double dates now, and Bucky loves dancing, always ready to whirl a girl around the floor, hands on her soft waist, the sticky mark of her lips on his cheek—

“'M usually gone by then,” Steve shrugs, trying to appear casual even though his face is pink with embarrassment. “Or she doesn't wanna, y'know, with me.” He smiles that small, self-deprecating smile that Bucky absolutely hates. “We both know I'm not the smoothest guy ever, not with dames.”

He straightens his tie in the mirror, runs a wet comb through his hair. Bucky leans against the sink, watching him.

“It's no big deal, Buck,” Steve says finally, turning to face him. “I can try to follow along.”

Bucky makes a face, wanting very much to fix the little line between Steve's eyebrows, make him actually excited about tonight. Steve is way too serious, most of the time, but when he laughs—well. Bucky's never understood how none of the girls seem to get it, that's all.

“We have an hour before we gotta meet 'em,” he says, an idea forming in his head. “I'll teach you.”

Steve snorts. “You can't teach me to dance in less than an hour!”

“Bet you a drink that I can too,” Bucky says, letting a smug grin spread across his face. He puffs his chest out. “Not to brag—”

“Oh, *here* we go—”

“—but many a girl's told me I'm a damn fine dancer,” he finishes, shoving Steve with his shoulder. Steve rolls his eyes again, but this time it's fond, and he shoves Bucky back. “I'll take that as a 'Yes, Bucky, please teach me all your best moves,'” Bucky says, leaving the bathroom.

“You can take it as a 'Why am I friends with this lug?' and nothin' else,” says Steve.

Bucky fakes a pout. “Here I thought you appreciated my brains 'n' wit.”

“I do,” Steve says solemnly. “They make me look better in comparison.”

“Aw, shut up.” Bucky stands in the middle of their bedroom between the two beds—their apartment is pretty much just the bedroom, the bathroom, and the matchbox kitchen, so there's not really enough space to give Steve a proper lesson, not with the kinda swing dancing the girls'll

expect tonight, but it'll have to do.

Steve hovers awkwardly in the doorway. Bucky beckons him over, holding out his left hand. “Basic Lindy Hop,” he says, “nothin' to it. Take my hand.”

Steve's hand is small and slender in his own, almost like a girl's, except for the calluses on his palm from stacking crates. They stand a couple feet apart, fingers entwined in the space between.

“Okay, now you're gonna lead,” Bucky says. He leers at Steve. “Pretend I'm a beautiful dame, yeah?”

“You're gonna need a lot more lipstick.” Steve's focused on their hands, biting his lip a little in concentration. “So what do I do?”

“One step back,” Bucky says, pushing forward gently, and then he slowly takes Steve through the footwork, guiding Steve's free hand to his lower back, raising his own free hand to wrap around Steve's upper arm.

The basic Lindy Hop is pretty easy—mostly just the same few steps over and over, the guy and girl mirroring each other—and Steve's always been quick on the uptake. Before long, they're moving in tight circles between their beds, Bucky murmuring, “Rock step, triple step, triple step,” hands coming up to hold each other and then coming apart, and Steve's not biting his lip or staring at his feet anymore. He's gazing up at Bucky, eyes soft and warm.

Bucky realizes that they're close together now, chests almost touching whenever they step in. Steve's hand is a spot of heat on Bucky's back, his grip firm, his lips quirked up at the corners, and Bucky wishes he could read Steve's mind. Which isn't anything new, but usually it doesn't happen when they're holding hands, dancing alone in their bedroom.

Steve coughs just once, and Bucky blinks. He stops mid step, lowers his hands, and offers a wry grin. “Looks like you got the hang of it.”

“Turns out the teacher wasn't as dumb as he looks,” Steve teases, running a hand through his hair. The sun is setting outside, casting them both in strange gold light, deep blue shadows.

“We should go,” Bucky says, which isn't the right response at all, but he can't quite think of a good comeback. “We're meetin' the girls outside the dance hall.”

“All right.” Steve steps up close to him, reaching up toward Bucky's face, and Bucky *panics* for a split second before Steve just fixes his collar and turns away, putting on his shoes.

What the hell, Barnes, Bucky thinks, taking a deep breath. *What the* hell.

Steve gives him a searching look as they leave the apartment, asks why he's so quiet all of a sudden. Bucky mutters something about being hungry.

A couple hours later, he and Sandy are twisting and swinging around each other, and she's a *fantastic* dancer, real pretty too, but Bucky keeps getting distracted. Because Steve and Caroline are dancing over in the corner, kinda slow and a bit awkward, but Steve is laughing at something and Caroline is giving him this look, the kind of look girls *never* give Steve, and Bucky thinks maybe she *gets* it, and for the life of him he can't understand why he's not happier about it.

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two

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Gabe and Morita are keeping each other upright, singing loudly, beers sloshing. Dernier's produced a harmonica from God knows where, Dum Dum and Falsworth are dancing drunkenly with the two pretty barmaids, Steve is chatting quietly with the white-haired old bartender, and Bucky is propped up in the darkest corner, halfway through his fourth whiskey.

Booze doesn't work on him quite as fast as it used to. He tries not to think about it much.

They're somewhere in northern Austria, shining bright with the success of their latest mission. A few miles south of here, Schmidt and Zola just lost another base. The Howling Commandos stood and watched as it burned to the ground.

Bucky can still taste the smoke in the back of his throat, thick and sour and pretty goddamn satisfying.

Across the bar, Falsworth chants, *"Overseas there came a pleading/'Help a nation in distress!'/And we gave our glorious laddies/Honor bade us do no less!"* and dips one of the barmaids so far down that her red hair brushes the floor and she shrieks, giggling wildly.

"C'mon, Barnes!" Dum Dum yells, beer dripping from his mustache. "Dance, sing, be merry! You're depressin' me!"

"I doubt anything could depress you, Dugan," says Falsworth, whirling his girl around, and Dernier adds, *"On manque de la bière?"* and Gabe cracks up.

"You'd dance circles around me, Dum Dum," Bucky drawls, tipping back the rest of his whiskey. It's finally starting to settle into his head, making everything warm, the straight lines of the bar tilting sideways.

Dum Dum waves one big hand theatrically. "To hell with you then, I'll just dance with the Captain!"

"Wait, wha—?" says Steve, but before he can finish, Dum Dum is dragging him away from the bar and into the middle of the floor. Then Dum Dum, Steve, and the second barmaid are doing some sort of uncoordinated, spinning dance, holding hands like children, and Steve's face is bright red and he kinda looks like he wants to disappear, and Bucky actually laughs out loud for the first time in months.

"You're s'posed to be on my side, Buck," Steve calls out over his shoulder, all pained and doe-eyed, tripping over his own feet, because he's fucking *huge* now and still forgets sometimes.

"Sorry, pal," Bucky says, raising his empty glass with a smirk. "I ain't nearly drunk enough."

Unfortunately, the other Commandos seem to take that as a challenge. Forty minutes later, Bucky is stumbling his way through the New York style shag with Morita, who's from Fresno and only knows a bit of Balboa, leaning on each other and getting their footwork all mixed up and dissolving into laughter every few seconds.

"No, *no*," Bucky says, slow with drink, gesturing vaguely at Morita's feet. "No, see, it's a *pulse*, ya gotta—ya gotta push into the ground, see, *pulse*, with your partner, like a heartbeat, 's how"—he breaks off, trying to make the words come out clearly—"how you get the right *rhythm*, see."

"Yeah, yeah," Morita nods. "That's right, you're right." He raises his voice, calling out to the others. "Hey, Barnes is some kinda genius, y'know that?"

“Ain't none of us geniuses,” says Gabe. “That's why we signed up for a war.”

The world blurs and Steve is right there all of a sudden, right at Bucky's side. Bucky pulls away from Morita to grab Steve's wrist. He leans in real close to Steve's big dumb face and mumbles, “Steve, Stevie,” grinning like a dope, and for a moment it's just like all the other times they had a few extra dollars at the end of the month and went out to a bar and staggered home at one in the morning beneath the big round moon.

“Hey there, Bucky,” Steve says, and he sounds very amused and very, very sober. His chest is broad and solid beneath Bucky's hands—*when did he put his hands on Steve's chest?*—and it occurs to Bucky for probably the hundredth time that Steve is strong now, strong and tall and near indestructible, and he doesn't need Bucky anymore, not at all.

“Dance with me, c'mon,” says Bucky senselessly, because right now Steve's looking at *him* and nobody else and he wants to keep it that way for as long as possible.

Steve smiles. “I dunno, Buck, I'm still not the best at the Lindy Hop.”

“Don't turn 'im down, Cap, you'll break his heart!” says Dum Dum. “God knows Barnes can't get himself a dame!”

“'S all lies, I'm a handsome devil an' you know it,” Bucky says, shooting Dum Dum a wicked grin. He looks back up—*up*, Jesus Christ—at Steve, raising his eyebrows. “C'mon, Rogers, let's see what you got.”

“All right,” says Steve, “but don't blame me if I step on your feet.”

“Play 'em a song, Dernier,” says Falsworth, and Dernier puts down his beer, brings the harmonica to his lips.

“*La Ballade du Capitaine et le Sergent,”* he says dramatically and begins to play.

Steve really *isn't* the best at the Lindy Hop, nowhere close. He copies what Bucky does until he starts to remember the steps, and even then his movements are a bit delayed, but Bucky can't stop beaming as they move in fast, sloppy circles. The girls cheer them on and the Commandos whoop and whistle, every last one of them dead wasted. Bucky hears himself babbling—“The *pulse*, Steve, without the pulse th' dance is dead”—and Steve is laughing, blushing high across his cheekbones, ten kinds of beautiful.

As soon as *that* thought slips into Bucky's head, he knows everything's gone way too far. He waves at Dernier to stop playing, ignoring the whines of the peanut gallery, and takes a step away from Steve.

“'Bout to fall over, I swear,” Bucky says, slurring the words on purpose. He and Steve both know Bucky's a cheerful, handsy drunk, and that's all the dance was. That's all it was.

Steve puts a hand on Bucky's shoulder, holding him steady. Bucky smiles up at him, and he knows there's probably far too much showing on his face—there's always too much, when it comes to Steve, too much affection, too much devotion, too much inescapable fear—but he's drunk, and they burned down a Hydra base today, and so for a single moment, Bucky will forgive himself for this.

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three

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Darcy Lewis once referred to Bucky as a professional bitcher, and right now, he's living up to the name.

“The mission I get,” he gripes, glaring at his reflection in the mirror. “Hell, I'll even put up with the monkey suit. But—fake bein' queer for each other?”

“We're being queer *people*,” Steve corrects him, because he's Steve and he stayed up all night researching terminology on the internet. “Or maybe queer-identifying? I think you can say both.”

Bucky sighs, smoothing out his jacket. The suits Coulson gave them each came with a price tag that made Bucky feel a little ill, because Christ, a single *sleeve* of this thing could pay six month's rent back in the forties. But even after the fall of S.H.I.E.L.D., Nick Fury has access to a stupid amount of money for weapons, armored cars, and now apparently custom-tailored Armani suits.

A not-so-insignificant part of Bucky actually sort of hopes things get messy tonight, because he'll be damned if he returns this ridiculous thing to Coulson in mint condition. It'd just be *wrong*.

Bucky glances over at Steve. He looks less big in a suit than he does in the Captain America costume, more lean muscle than bulk. His blond hair is styled neatly, his face smooth and handsome, and Bucky suddenly feels like Frankenstein's monster beside him. Body and brain patched together with ugly black stitches.

He reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out the single black leather glove, sliding it over the metal fingers of his left hand.

“You don't have to wear that, you know,” says Steve.

Bucky raises an eyebrow. “The goal is to blend in, Steve. Pretty sure a bionic arm will put people off.”

Steve's mouth tightens like it always does when he's about to be very stubborn, and Bucky feels a swell of decades-old fondness at the sight. “If people can't handle your arm—”

“—then it'll compromise the mission,” Bucky finishes. “You can beat 'em up for being close-minded later. For now, pal, I gotta wear the glove.” He steps closer, bumping his left shoulder into Steve's. “Lighten up, Rogers. I need you to charm all these blue bloods so I don't have to talk to anyone.”

“If you think *I'm* the charming one, we're doomed,” says Steve, which is total bullshit, because he's got the whole Captain Bambi Eyes thing going for him, whereas Bucky kind of radiates suspicion and distrust. To be honest, he doesn't like most people these days, except Steve. And Natasha. And Sam, and okay, the Avengers as a group are generally pretty solid, especially when Tony isn't talking.

Everyone else, though. Too many strangers, too many voices, and the Winter Soldier begins to surface, dead-eyed and dripping with ice.

Steve's phone vibrates, the screen lighting up with a text: *TEN MINUTES*.

Bucky groans, steps into Steve's space, and takes Steve's right hand in his left, bringing up his other hand to curve around Steve's shoulder blade.

“Uh,” says Steve.

“So you spent all night figurin' out the nicest way to call me your fella,” says Bucky, “but I'll bet you a drink that you didn't look up how to properly waltz.”

Steve's mouth falls open a little bit.

“Hopeless,” Bucky says, shaking his head. “C'mon, we got ten minutes, let's make the best of it.” He tilts his face up toward the ceiling. “Hey, JARVIS?”

“*Yes, Agent Barnes?”*

“Play us a tune, wouldya?”

“*Certainly, sir.”*

Bucky recognizes the song with the first strains of soft guitar—it was on one of the mix CDs Sam made for him. The Mills Brothers, “You Always Hurt The One You Love.”

Funny, JARVIS, he thinks vehemently, vowing to figure out a way to short circuit the whole of Stark Tower, but if Steve notices anything he doesn't show it. They just move through the steps, forward diagonal together back, one-two-three one-two-three. It's easier than the Lindy Hop by far, and by the time the song picks up a quicker pace, Steve is a natural. He smiles down at Bucky as they turn in smooth circles, stepping in synch.

The Mills Brothers barely begin to fade out before JARVIS starts another song, something Bucky doesn't recognize about a rock and roll waltz, and Steve huffs a laugh at the lyrics and takes over as lead, bringing their joined hands above their heads.

“You wanna spin me like a girl, Stevie?” Bucky asks, smirking. He steps forward instead, and Steve wasn't expecting it, so their noses are just a couple inches apart. “Save it for when we've got an audience.”

Steve's eyes flutter shut, his mouth twisting. “Don't remind me.”

Bucky tightens his grip on Steve's hand. “Shouldn't be that bad. Just gettin' intel.”

“That's not the part I'm—,” Steve begins and then cuts himself off, jaw working. He opens his eyes and gazes down at Bucky. “Never mind. You're right, should be pretty easy.”

“At least there's no giant aliens,” Bucky says dryly, and then frowns and leans in a little, curious. “What did you—?”

“Okay, this is just sickening,” says Tony, staring at them from the doorway of the elevator.

They freeze, still wrapped up in each other in the middle of the front room. Then Steve pulls away just a bit too fast, and Bucky drops his arms to his sides, swallowing.

“Bucky was teaching me how to waltz,” Steve says, and it sounds kind of weird and empty.

Tony just rolls his eyes. “Whatever. Your ride's on the roof, I'm here to steal your peanut butter and something called a *pastry scraper*, and please stop involving JARVIS in your awkward hormonal self-discovery.” He gestures between them. “My advice? It's 2014. Stop leaving so much room for Jesus.”

Bucky has absolutely no idea how to respond to any of that, so he's glad when Steve just says, “Peanut butter's in the cupboard and I have no idea what a pastry scraper is,” before heading into the elevator.

Bucky closes his eyes, summons a fraction of the Soldier's ice, and follows.

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four

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The club is called The Bulge, which is about the stupidest thing Bucky's ever heard, but then again this entire mission is pretty damn stupid as well. He actually started protesting before Coulson even finished the briefing ("Fucking—*again?* Why *us*?" he demanded, and then Tony said, "Is he being serious? Please tell me he's not being serious," and then Banner said delicately, "You two *have* kind of proven yourselves good at it," and it went downhill from there) but it was completely ineffective.

So here he is, dressed in tight clothes that offer zero protection and mostly just restrict his movements, surrounded by a hundred loud, drunk, sweaty people grinding against each other beneath the flashing neon lights, and there's a fucking *smoke machine*, and *anyone* could be concealing a weapon, and people keep bumping into him or trying to pull him into a dance, and honestly Bucky's about five seconds away from just saying *fuck it* and bolting.

"Hey," Steve says into his ear, voice raised over the pounding music, and Bucky twitches violently. Steve raises his eyebrows. "You okay?"

"Fuckin' *fantastic*," Bucky growls. "This is my new favorite mission. Even more fun than Helsinki."

Steve winces. Helsinki had been one massive, weeklong disaster. The Avengers do not talk about Helsinki.

Bucky stands up on his tip toes to speak in Steve's ear, bracing his right hand on Steve's shoulder. "You seen the target yet?"

"No," Steve says, and Bucky shivers a bit when Steve's breath rushes across the side of his face. "It's only midnight, though, he usually shows up later—"

Someone stumbles into Bucky from behind, knocking him forward into Steve's chest. He turns around, glaring at the guy—who is shirtless, eyes glazed over, glistening with sweat and glitter—until he slinks away, back into the writhing crowd. Bucky turns back around, scowling. "Steve, I hate this place."

Steve's mouth quirks. "Here I thought you loved dancing."

"This," Bucky says loudly, gesturing at the club as a whole, "is *not* dancing."

"Old fogey," Steve says, and Bucky tries to hide his grin—Steve is and has always been a total shit, no matter how much he puts on the whole *earnest* act, and Bucky enjoys it shamelessly. The Avengers realized about five minutes after Steve and Bucky moved into Stark Tower that Bucky has a knack for bringing out "Captain Sass-merica" (credit to Darcy Lewis), and Bucky isn't proud of many things, but he's extremely proud of that.

"Kids these days," he sniffs, putting on his best cranky-old-man face, and it works: Steve cracks up, shaking his head fondly. Bucky watches him for a moment—the curve of his mouth, the whiteness of his teeth, the colored lights flashing blue and pink and green across his face—before ducking his head down, because he's never quite been able to handle Steve looking at him like that. Like Bucky is something amazing.

(The first time he made a joke after coming back to Steve, Steve just stared at him for a long moment before actually *tearing up*, and Bucky hid his face in his hands because he had no idea what the hell to do with that, and then Steve stepped forward and gently pulled Bucky's wrists down and touched their foreheads together and murmured, "God, Buck, I missed you so damn much," and Bucky melted into it and felt safe and warm and—)

"Let's dance," he says, tilting his face up to meet Steve's eyes.

"What?"

"Gotta blend in," Bucky smirks. "C'mon, Rogers, there's not any footwork, even *you* can—"

Steve drags him in by the belt loops, hands big and warm on Bucky's hips. Their noses are almost touching, their bodies flush, and Bucky blinks in surprise before letting a wide grin spread across his face.

"Let's see what you got, Barnes," Steve goads, and Bucky says, "That'll be the day, when Captain America *grinds*," and Steve says into his ear, "See, I never really got that."

"Got what?" asks Bucky, circling his arms around Steve's neck. They're each looking over the other's shoulder, still scanning the crowd for their target, even as Steve moves his hands from Bucky's hips to the small of his back. The wordless music vibrates in Bucky's ribcage, bass throbbing through his whole body.

"I never was the suavest guy, sure," says Steve, and Bucky feels the rumble of his voice, "but I *did* serve in the army. Captain America knows how to say 'fuck' in a dozen languages."

"Jesus," Bucky breathes, because he already knows there's a good chance he'll never recover from Steve saying *fuck* right into his ear. He's still human, after all.

One song bleeds into another. The two of them are just standing there wrapped around each other, not really moving, and Bucky glances at the people around them, all the half-dressed men rubbing against each other, skin slick with sweat and hands roaming everywhere, all the guys looking at Steve like they want to eat him alive, and thinks, *All right, fuck it,* and rolls his hips.

Steve sucks in a breath and pulls back to look at Bucky, eyes wide.

Bucky just shrugs, unrepentant, and moves his hips again. "Said you wanted to see what I got."

"I—yeah," says Steve.

"So," says Bucky, leaning forward and letting his lips graze Steve's ear, relishing the tiny noise Steve makes in the back of his throat, "lemme show you."

A pause, and then Steve nods jerkily, his fingers pressing harder into Bucky's back. Bucky grins again, feeling kind of reckless and stupid and momentarily young, and turns around in Steve's arms. He leans back into Steve's chest, arms still hooked around Steve's neck, and *now* they look like everyone else.

Bucky moves his hips in small circles, tipping his head back against Steve's shoulder and letting his human fingers tug gently on Steve's hair. He doesn't go too far with it, doesn't grind his ass into Steve's crotch as hard as he wants to, but God, it feels *damn* good anyway, especially when Steve's hips rock forward too.

Then they're moving together, slow and almost languid, the bass thumping through them. Steve's

hands spread out across Bucky's stomach, and Bucky turns his face to the side, nosing against Steve's jaw, breathing in the smell of sweat and aftershave and other people's cologne.

“So, Stevie,” he says, only just loud enough to be heard over the music. “How's it compare to the Lindy?”

“Less complicated,” Steve says. He rests his chin on Bucky's shoulder for a moment, their cheeks brushing. “No steps to forget. But I gotta say, I prefer things face to face.”

Bucky smiles, shifts a bit so Steve can feel it. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I'm nothin' if not obliging,” says Bucky and twists around again. Their gazes meet for a moment, and Bucky's heart stutters at the darkness in Steve's eyes, the flush of heat across his skin. He pulls Bucky close immediately, almost like a hug except for how they're still rocking into each other, Bucky's fingers tangled in Steve's hair, and *oh,* Steve's fingers are stroking his bare skin, rucking up his shirt—Bucky slides his thigh between Steve's legs, pressing forward, and he's *rock hard* and thinks maybe, just *maybe*, Steve might be too—

Bucky catches sight of the target over Steve's shoulder, slipping through a door behind the bar. The smoke and colorful lights are murder on his eyes, but Bucky's spent the last two weeks watching every video they got on this guy. He'd recognize him anywhere, even from behind.

He takes a fraction of a second to get himself under control, to wrench his focus away from Steve's hands on his skin and Steve's breath on his neck.

“Steve.” His voice comes out firm, unwavering. *Thank God.* “Got a twenty on the target.”

Steve falters for a moment, then gives a sharp nod. They don't stop dancing, but there's no heat to it anymore, just bodies moving automatically. “Where?”

“Can't see us. Went through a door. Your ten o'clock.”

“Watch my six,” says Steve, and when he pulls away to follow the target, the entire front half of Bucky's body feels cold.

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five

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Movie Night Fridays started out just between Steve and Bucky, because they discovered there were, like, fifty new Disney movies since 1943, and Steve's always had a love affair with animation. Then Sam and Natasha found out and invited themselves along, and then Tony showed up one night and insisted on making them all sit through *The 40-Year-Old Virgin,* which Bucky thought was a weird choice until Tony turned to Steve and said cheerfully, “I guess you can sympathize, huh, Cap?” and Steve dumped the bowl of popcorn over Tony's head.

After that, whenever the rest of the Avengers didn't have much going on, Movie Night Fridays became a regular thing.

Tonight, all the Avengers plus their various satellites are crowded into the common area. Clint picked *Dirty Dancing*, but nobody's really paying attention—about fifteen minutes in, Thor decided to give them all a demonstration of traditional Asgardian dance, and is currently spinning

Jane around energetically while she laughs and trips and hangs on for dear life.

The Welcoming of Summer, Thor called it. Bucky watches them whirl around, beaming at each other, and remembers dancing with girls who wore polka dot dresses and curled their hair, girls who kissed him goodnight in the balmy July heat before he walked home to Steve.

If that was summer, he thinks, and then that became winter, where are we now?

"And—there!" Thor says in his booming voice, finishing the dance with a flourish. Jane leans into his side, breathless and giggling, hair falling across her face.

"Very nice," says Bruce. "I liked the"—he gestures awkwardly—"leg thing."

Tony shrugs, tossing a handful of popcorn into his mouth. "Pretty good, but it's no salsa."

"There is no way you can salsa," says Clint, and Bucky and Steve meet each other's eyes and groan, because everyone in the room knows where *this* is going.

Sure enough, Tony stands up a moment later, holds his hand out to Pepper dramatically, and says, *"Bailemos."*

She just looks at him. "Tony, I'm enjoying my trail mix."

"C'mon, honey, *bailemos*," he whines, and she rolls her eyes but smiles fondly as she takes his hand.

It turns out Tony can in fact salsa, as he proves aggressively over the next five minutes. Then Clint and Natasha show off some weird acrobatic dance that honestly looks more like an outright sparring session, and then Jane pulls Bruce into a rather uncoordinated waltz, and Nat drags Sam off the couch to teach him a Russian folk dance (*Tropak*, Bucky's brain supplies), and Thor grabs Steve's hands and says, "Come, Captain, I will teach you the Dance of the Returning Warrior!" and Bucky's laughing his ass off at Steve, whose face is bright red, and then Natasha appears in front of him and says, "Oh no you don't, James," and yanks him to his feet.

"Natalia—," he begins, but she just shakes her head, giving him that half-smile, and says, "Teach me the jitterbug."

"It's not *the* jitterbug, you're *a* jitterbug when you're dancing it," he informs her, taking her right hand in his left.

She shrugs. "Sorry, Grandpa, it was a bit before my time."

"Always with the old jokes," Bucky sighs. Natasha just gives him a shit-eating grin.

He dances with Jane next, and then Pepper, and then Thor—which is interesting, because Thor is even bigger than Steve and about three times as loud, and their dance almost puts Bucky's metal arm through the TV—and then he's turning around, laughing a bit as he reaches toward Natasha again, and Steve stumbles right into him.

"Whoa there, big guy," Bucky says, still half-laughing. He steadies Steve with a hand on his shoulder, then reaches his other hand down to grab Steve's, pulling him into a waltz. Steve goes with it, biting his lip in concentration. Bucky raises an eyebrow. "Bit outta practice, huh?"

"I was never really *in* practice," Steve says, smiling down at him sheepishly. "You always were the good dancer, Buck."

Bucky grins smugly. “And don't you forget it.”

“I won't,” Steve says, and it comes out too sincere for the teasing conversation, just on the wrong side of serious. He blinks and looks away, jaw clenched.

“Hey, it's okay, Stevie,” Bucky says softly, even though he has no idea what the problem even is. “I was jokin'.” He peers up into Steve's face as they turn in slow circles. “C'mon, look at me, what's the matter?”

“Nothing, it's nothing,” Steve mutters. He lets go of Bucky's hand and shoulder, taking a step back. “Um—I'm gonna get some air, I'll be right back.”

He walks away without another word. Bucky just stands there, completely nonplussed, until he meets Natasha's gaze from across the room.

Go, you moron, she mouths at him, jerking her head toward the elevator doors as they close behind Steve. Beside her, Sam just rolls his eyes and whispers in her ear, and Bucky can't quite hear it, but—

“I can read lips, Wilson,” he says as he walks up to them, winding his way through the dancing, laughing Avengers.

“Good,” says Sam. “Superheroes *are* drama queens, now you finally know.”

“Asshole.”

“Dickhead.” Sam claps him on the shoulder. “Go get your boy, Barnes.”

“Yes, sir,” Bucky says, giving a sarcastic salute, and heads into the elevator. “Hey, JARVIS?”

“*He's on the roof, sir.”*

“...Thanks.”

New York is cold in March, and the top of Stark Tower is colder still, icy wind whipping through Bucky's hair. But it's oddly quiet, all the noise of the city lost this high up. Bucky takes a deep breath, letting the cold fill his lungs, reveling in the strange certainty that it will not last forever.

Steve is sitting on one of the chaises Tony put up here, elbows on his knees. He glances up when Bucky approaches, his mouth twisted in a fake smile.

“Hey, Buck. Sorry, I just needed a second. You can go back...,” he trails off at the look on Bucky's face.

Bucky sits next to him on the chaise, studying him. “Thought you liked my dancing.” He bumps Steve's shoulder with his own. “Now, I'm no Natalia, but I ain't so bad.”

“Yeah, you're all right,” Steve says. “Managed to get me Lindy Hopping, at least.”

But he doesn't smile or look at Bucky when he says it, and Bucky leans in a bit closer, frowning. “C'mon, pal, what's wrong?”

Silence, nothing but the wind, and then:

“Everyone thinks I'm such a good man,” says Steve quietly, and Bucky goes still. “And I try to be, Buck, I try my damndest...but there are some things I can't ever be good about, I guess. Can't not be selfish about. And I keep realizing it. That's all.”

“Stevie, you idiot,” Bucky says, ignoring Steve's look of surprise. “You're the best man I ever knew.” He fidgets a bit, trying to find words. “Everybody's selfish about some things, only difference is that everybody didn't grow up in the Great Depression.”

Steve nods, and Bucky wishes he were better at this, but Steve leans into him anyway, a line of heat against his side. After a moment, he just says, “Food shortages. Another thing I'll never miss.”

“Remember sugar rations?” asks Bucky.

“Yeah, I remember you whining at me,” Steve says, raising his eyebrows. “You and your sweet tooth. I was fine, but God forbid you didn't get your Chick-O-Sticks.”

“I liked those.”

“They still sell 'em, you know.” Steve looks at him, mouth turned up. “I looked it up on the internet.”

“Oh, *did* you now,” says Bucky. “You looked it up on the Google? With one of those newfangled shiny typewriters?”

Steve blinks at him, eyes wide and earnest. “Yeah, while I was watching color TV and using a *mobile telephone*. Golly, Buck, the modern world sure is swell.”

Bucky snorts. “Clint still thinks you don't know how to text, you know.”

“I know,” Steve says. “Sam and I have a bet going over how many ridiculous autocorrects I can send him before he figures out it's on purpose.”

“Steve Rogers, you little punk,” Bucky says fondly.

Steve shrugs, looking pleased with himself. “Nobody ever suspects Captain America.”

“I'm proud as hell, pal.” Bucky swings his legs up onto the chaise and lies on his back, looking up at the big dark sky. A few stars peek through the blanket of smog, the moon glowing bright white, almost full. He shivers in the cold.

Steve shifts, lying down beside him. Bucky curls into him automatically, resting his head on Steve's shoulder, like they used to do on cold winter nights in Brooklyn. Except back then Bucky was the pillow, and Steve's heartbeat was small and weak.

“Fuckin' human furnace nowadays, aren't you,” Bucky mumbles.

Steve huffs a soft laugh. “Cross hypothermia off the list.”

“Yeah, now all I gotta worry about is aliens and supervillains.”

“You don't hafta worry, Buck,” says Steve, and he rearranges them so his arm is curved around Bucky, his fingers idly trailing Bucky's spine.

“You just don't get it, do ya, Stevie.”

“Get what?”

Bucky turns sideways so they're lying face to face. “Never gonna stop worrying,” he says, smiling a little. “Got seventy years to make up for.”

Steve sighs. “Stubborn as hell in 1940, stubborn as hell in 2015.”

“It's part of my charm.”

“Well, I'll give you that.”

They gaze at each other for a long moment, both kinda grinning like dopes. Steve's face is mostly in shadow, the edges lit up by the moon, but Bucky doesn't need any light to see Steve Rogers's face. He's got it memorized from every angle. Has always known it better than his own, even before the brainwashing.

“We should probably get back,” Steve murmurs.

“Yeah,” says Bucky. Neither of them move. Bucky listens to the strong sound of Steve's heartbeat, smells his detergent and the shampoo they share, melts into the trail of warmth Steve's fingers leave on his back.

They fit together.

They always have.

To hell with it, Bucky thinks, as he looks into Steve's eyes. *To hell with all of it.*

“Stevie,” he says softly, “I'm gonna do something, and I need you to stop me if it ain't all right.”

Steve frowns, confused. “What...?”

“Say no,” says Bucky, and then he props himself up on one elbow and leans in, watching Steve's eyes widen. He pauses right before their lips touch, but Steve doesn't say anything, just stares up at him, breath frozen in his throat. So Bucky moves forward that last half inch to brush their mouths together, dry and gentle, barely even a kiss.

He sighs a little against Steve's lips and pulls back a couple inches, just far enough to meet Steve's eyes.

“You haven't said no yet,” Bucky whispers.

“No,” Steve breathes, and then immediately makes a *ridiculous* face. “No, God, I meant—I meant yes, I haven't said no. Um.”

“Jesus Christ,” says Bucky, trying not to laugh. “Is this how it's gonna be? One kiss and—”

“Oh, shut *up*,” Steve says, and then he wraps one big hand around the back of Bucky's neck and drags him in. Their noses bump until Bucky changes the angle, fitting their mouths together. He can't help the small noise he makes, the way his right hand shakes when he slides it up Steve's chest, and Steve's fingers tighten in his hair.

He sucks Steve's full lower lip into his mouth, the way he's been wanting to do for about eighty years now, worries it lightly with his teeth, presses a kiss to Steve's upper lip. Steve gasps a little, his mouth falling open. Bucky licks into it, tastes the salt on Steve's lips, curls their tongues together. He kisses Steve slow and firm, easing him into it, because Bucky will be damned before he fucks this up. Not with *Steve*, not after so goddamn long.

But then Steve moans a little, tugging at Bucky's hair, and he says, “God, Buck,” like a prayer, so *reverently*, and Bucky swallows the words and rolls over to lie on top of him. He frames Steve's

face in his hands, straddling his legs, and opens his mouth wider, sucking on Steve's tongue. Steve makes a noise deep in his throat, and then his hands are under Bucky's shirt, skimming up his back.

“Oh Steve,” Bucky says, as quiet as he can, and kisses the hollow of Steve's cheek, the line of his jaw, his swollen mouth again, and again and again. Steve's hands curve around Bucky's ribs, and his whole body is so warm, and Bucky can't help the breathless grin that spreads across his face.

Steve kisses his teeth and then breaks away, beaming up at Bucky. “Hey.”

“Hi,” says Bucky.

Steve shifts, pulling Bucky even closer against him, tangling their feet together at the end of the chaise. He kisses Bucky once, twice, sweet and chaste, their teeth clicking together because neither of them can stop smiling.

“My room,” Bucky mumbles into his mouth. “Come to my room, Stevie.”

“Yeah,” says Steve, “yeah, yeah—”

They scramble to their feet, tripping into each other and holding hands like teenagers. Bucky laughs brightly, and if he pulls Steve in for a minute, waltzing to no music on the chilly rooftop of Stark Tower, well, at least no one's around to see.

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When Bucky opens his eyes the next morning, it takes every single ounce of control in his body not to immediately go for his knife.

“What the fuck,” he barks, staring wide-eyed at the *fucking Avengers*, all of whom except Bruce are crowded around the foot of his bed. “What the *fuck*?”

“Morning, sunshine,” says Tony. “Calm down, we're all extremely harmless.”

“I am an *ex-fucking-assassin*,” Bucky says incredulously.

“We are here to congratulate you, my friends!” says Thor, grinning down at him.

Steve, who is sort of an aggressive cuddler, nuzzles his nose into Bucky's neck and says sleepily, “Shh. If we're quiet an' don't make any sudden movements, they'll forget we're here.”

“Wow, I want Steve to be half asleep *always*,” says Tony, looking absolutely delighted. “This is so great. This so much better than when he's alert.”

Bucky groans. “I hate your friends, Rogers.”

“Sorry, I tried to hold them off,” says Natasha.

Clint snorts. “You said, 'Respect their privacy, boys,' and then I said, 'But we think Steve got laid,' and then you were like, 'Well, if you must.'”

Bucky glares at her. She shrugs unapologetically.

Steve blinks a little, but still doesn't extract himself from where he's wrapped around Bucky. He isn't generally very touchy-feely—Bucky's always been the one to initiate hugs, to sling his arm around Steve's shoulders—but when Steve sleeps, he is and has always been a handsome, blond octopus.

“If you all get outta here,” Steve says, “I'll make pancakes.”

“Make enough for Sam,” Natasha tells him. “He's on his way over.”

“Jesus Christ, you're the Avengers,” says Bucky. “None of you got anything more important goin' on today?”

Tony shrugs. “Bruce apparently did. He's in his lab sending us all disapproving texts. Really overusing the basic frowny face, IMHO. There's a whole world of emojis out there.”

“Tell Bruce he's my favorite,” says Bucky. “Now get out.”

They all shuffle out of the bedroom, Natasha tossing a wink over her shoulder, and Bucky flops back down on the pillows. Steve gives him a little half-smile.

“You *like* them,” he says.

Bucky scowls. “I don't. I like you and now Banner.” He pauses, thinking. “Sometimes Sam.”

Steve just shakes his head, and Bucky catches a glimpse of a fading red bruise just under his ear, healing quickly but still there. He gazes at it proudly, reaches out to trace it with his fingers. Steve draws in a quiet breath.

“I promised them pancakes,” Steve says, but his eyes are flicking over Bucky's face, catching on his mouth.

“They save the world on a regular basis,” says Bucky, “they can make their own damn pancakes,” and then he pulls Steve in, to hell with morning breath, and kisses him with eighty years of wanting, *waiting*, because he finally can.

Chapter 2

Hello everyone—those of you who are reading this because you're subscribed to me, because you recognized my name or the fic title, because you just happened to click on this for the first time—

This is really long. Sorry about that. But I hope you read all of it.

Basically, I have some news.

It's very good news.

I have written a book, and that book is going to be published.

I am super excited about this. I can't tell you anything about the story yet—it's hush hush for now—but it's a story I really believe in, and it's only the first step in what I hope will be a very long career of writing books.

HOWEVER.

I am going to be published. My name is gonna be out there in the Real World. And my fandom accounts—my Tumblr, my AO3—have been around long enough that they're kind of inextricably linked to my actual real life name.

I don't actually mind that. Like I said, it's inextricable. I'm not ashamed of my fandom life, especially because writing fic is the single best thing I have ever done for myself As A Writer. Fic has helped me improve more than college ever did. And beyond that: all your feedback, and all your incredibly kind comments, has helped me as a person. I don't know where I would be right now if I hadn't spent my teenage years writing fic. I would be a worse writer, that's for sure. And there have been plenty of times when reading over your comments was the only thing that made me actually open up a new doc and start typing.

That said, I do want to enter the world of publishing and "professional" writing with a clean slate.

So in about 24 hours (May 19, 12:00AM EST) I will be taking down my all my fics and then deleting my AO3 account.

I'm really sad about this, guys. Again: I cannot put into words how much YOUR words have encouraged me over the years. I have read all your comments (all of them twice, some 10+ times). I appreciate every single comment I have ever gotten. Your excitement, your emotions, your passion for the characters we both love—it keeps me writing. It's why I want to write books.

I'm going to lose your comments. I am really, really sad about that.

But I don't want you to lose my work. You've told me that it makes you happy, and that makes me happy. So heck it—I'm taking it off the internet, but the reason I'm waiting a day is because I want to give you a chance to keep it.

So: **if you want to download my work (and you haven't already), now is the time.** Download away, y'all. Put it on your Kindle, print it out, take screenshots, whatever you want. It's yours.

There will still be podfics and translations up—I'm not asking anyone else to delete their hard work. Just the originals will be gone. (My Tumblr is staying up for now, though I might end up deleting that too.)

If you want to contact me—or hear updates about my Book Thing—feel free to follow me on Twitter.

So…that's it. All that's left to say is: **thank you.** Thank you so, so, so much. For your comments, for your kudos, for your endless support. Thank you to the people who have read and commented on everything I've ever posted; thank you for the silent kudos-ers; thank you to the lurkers. Every single one of you made me a better writer. Thank you.

Much love.

End Notes

My Tumblr.
My Twitter.

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!